

9 Human being, individual and social

KEVIN VANHOOZER

'Know thyself.' Socrates' exhortation is as urgent, and problematic, as ever: urgent, because the human race at the dawn of the third millennium, following the demise of the Christian paradigm and the break-up of modernity, is suffering from a collective identity crisis; problematic, because it demands the impossible, since to know oneself truly involves knowing *more* than oneself. Humans – the self-interpreting animals – have nonetheless responded to the challenge with creativity and zest, striving for self-knowledge through conceptual schemes and cultural works alike.

A THEOLOGICAL STORY?

What is man, that thou are mindful of him? (*Psalm 8:4*)

To what extent is 'man' the proper study not only of mankind, as Alexander Pope suggested, but of theology as well? Theological anthropology offers a distinctive and decisive perspective on the issue of what it means to be human – a question of no little controversy, and one whose answer has wide-reaching consequences not only for the understanding, but also for the practice, of human being: for debates about genetic engineering, human rights, ecology, sexuality, education and politics. The task of Christian theology is to clarify what is distinctively theological in its account of personhood and to formulate criteria for what is authentically Christian in its accounts of human being.

Theological anthropology: method and significance

For all their borrowings from philosophy, virtually none of the early Christian theologians felt obliged to adhere to Socrates' principle. The human creature enjoys neither metaphysical nor methodological pride of place: humanity comes second both in the order of being and in the order of knowing. Augustine's famous prayer – 'our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee' – expresses a keen sense of humanity's orientation towards

God. The human creature comes second to God, both in the order of being (namely, creation) and in the order of knowledge (namely, revelation). The human being is a 'metaphysical animal', constituted by a desire for what is greater than itself, for ultimate reality. John Calvin develops Augustine's insight into a methodological first principle: 'Without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self.'¹ Medieval and Reformed theologians, as well as their creeds and confessions, typically place their discussions of anthropology after the doctrine of God. Theological anthropology is an implicit and derivative, not explicit and foundational, doctrine. We only reach the stage of theological anthropology when we affirm that man is a being who has to do with God, or rather, when we affirm that God is the one who has to do with human being. The primary sources for classical Christian thinking about human being are the doctrine of God and the book of Genesis.

Modern theology, in the wake of the turn towards the subject by Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, reversed Calvin's maxim: there is no knowledge of God except through knowledge of self. 'There is none that can read God aright, unless he first spell Man.'² Human subjectivity acquires foundational status; the doctrine of God becomes an implication of some aspect of human being. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for instance, conceives of theology as the science of (human) faith rather than the science of God. For Rudolf Bultmann, theological statements are primarily statements about human existence. Modern theology reverses the polarities between God and human being; anthropology has thus become an 'omnipresent element' correlated with each of the major theological topics.

The turn to the subject has not gone unchallenged in twentieth-century theology. For to begin theology by reflecting on human experience seems only to exchange one mystery for another. Furthermore, though Christian theology clearly deals both with God and humanity, the issue is whether Christian anthropology should be anthropocentric rather than theocentric. Karl Barth, an early critic of modern theology, charged liberal theology with never getting beyond anthropology. Barth modifies Calvin's maxim in one crucial respect: he maintains that there is no knowledge of God or self apart from knowledge of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God reveals his 'humanity', that is, his being with and for the human creature. We may therefore say, in the light of the incarnation, that humanity is a theme of theology, not in spite of, but *because* God is the theme of theology. In sum, theological anthropology is the attempt to think through the meaning of the human story, as it unfolds from Genesis through the Gospels to the Apocalypse and as it is lived out before, with and by God.

Stories and sciences of humanity: non-theological anthropology

Human being is a theme not only of the biblical story of creation, fall and redemption, but of diverse stories, told by scientists, poets, philosophers and historians among others. Which version is authoritative: that which privileges the notions of natural cause and universal law, or that which speaks of nurture rather than nature and of actual existence rather than of abstract essence? What is the relation between the Christian story of human being and the various accounts of the natural and human sciences? On the one hand, it is difficult simply to ignore what the arts and sciences say about human being; on the other, it is theologically inappropriate merely to add a few Christian elements to a non-theological understanding that is left essentially untouched. An alternative approach is for theologians critically to appropriate non-theological anthropologies. Secular descriptions are provisional versions of human reality that need to be deepened, or perhaps disciplined, by explicitly Christian beliefs.

The human creature is, to a large extent, a 'microcosm' of the world as a whole. Human being has a material dimension that is a proper object of analysis by the natural sciences: 'dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Genesis 3:19). One can study, for instance, the chemical composition of the human body. The natural sciences, however, taken by themselves, provide only a truncated account of human being. They succeed in analysing the human creature's relation to the rest of the material world, but neither biochemistry nor genetics can adequately explain human behaviour. Adultery, for example, is not simply the 'effect' of a genetic predisposition to sow one's DNA. The physical sciences may account for Nature, but not Freedom. Human action requires at least three more distinct levels of analysis: the behavioural and the social, focusing on individuals and communities respectively, and the spiritual. It is not possible to understand cultural works with categories taken from the physical sciences; the study of human society is irreducible to the language of matter in motion.

Human beings are not only sentient but sapient, able not only to have sensations and experiences but to reflect on and interpret them. What distinguishes *homo sapiens* from other creatures is rationality. Early modern philosophers agreed with Aristotle: to be human is to be a rational animal. The Enlightenment preoccupation with what is universal in the human condition was influenced both by the classical Christian view that what defines humanity is the soul rather than the body, and by the conviction that reason could be used to define the essence of the human animal.

In the nineteenth century, the new 'human' sciences challenged the Enlightenment view that there is a single universal human nature: 'Whatever else modern anthropology asserts ... it is firm in the conviction that men unmodified by the customs of particular places do not in fact exist.'³ The discovery that human being is nurtured in disparate historical contexts had a tremendous impact on the concept of humanity: 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun'.⁴ Culture is one such web. Wilhelm Dilthey suggested that, whereas the natural sciences seek to explain the world by formulating causal laws, the human sciences seek to understand human being by interpreting what individuals and societies have done. Life – both individual and corporate – is a text, culture a public document. Social anthropologists find it difficult to draw lines between what is universal and necessary in the human condition and what is only conventional and arbitrary. Cultural anthropologists offer 'thick descriptions' of cultures, and so determine the range of the variety of the human species. It is only by charting the historical careers of individual cultures that one eventually begins to grasp what are the parameters that define human nature. The study of culture 'provides the link between what men are intrinsically capable of becoming and what they actually, one by one, in fact become'.⁵

The arts represent another strategy for responding to Socrates' admonition. Human beings are self-interpreting animals.⁶ The 'humanities' express both the universals and the uniqueness, the constants and the contingencies of human selfhood. Literature is a laboratory wherein authors study the human condition by exploring the panoply of human possibilities. Aristotle held poetry to convey universal truth and thus to be more philosophical than history. Painters, similarly, seek self-understanding through self-portraiture. Rembrandt's works, it has been said, portray the whole Protestant doctrine of human being. It is perhaps in music above all that humanity flexes its freedom and explores its spirit. Melodies are 'the supreme mystery of man' and have the power to mend, or rend, the heart in ways that are inexplicable by psychology or physics alike.⁷ Brahms's fourth symphony, for example, takes us to the very threshold of transcendence and the theological, as do other poetic and painterly renditions of the human condition.

An incoherent story?

According to the novelist Walker Percy, the conventional wisdom of the twentieth century about human being contains two major components, the one owing to modern science, the other representing a rather attenuated

legacy of Christian faith. On the one hand, we understand human being 'as an organism in an environment, a sociological unit ... endowed genetically like other organisms with needs and drives'; on the other hand, we view humans 'to be somehow endowed with certain other unique properties ... certain inalienable rights, reason, freedom, and an intrinsic dignity' ⁸ Percy believes that most educated Westerners would assent to both propositions, but that these two propositions, taken together, are radically incoherent. It is increasingly clear in philosophy and general culture alike that personhood has become an endangered concept. Modern theories of the self no longer yield self-understanding.

While scientific accounts of human being may be provisional and incomplete, the philosopher's stories struggle with the near incoherence of their subject matter. All animals exhibit various kinds of behaviour, but none so paradoxical as the human. All creatures have an instinct for survival, but only the human creature takes foolhardy risks. All creatures are mortal, but only the human creature dreams of immortality. Only humans are capable both of war and peace, poetry and pornography, rationality and self-deception, greatness and pettiness, heroism and villainy. The challenge to philosophical anthropology is to account, in a coherent conceptual scheme, both for our optimism about humanity's creative possibilities and our pessimism about humanity's destructive potential.

Several postmodern thinkers deny that there is any fixed human nature and question whether *homo sapiens* is really a 'rational animal'. Michel Foucault has rushed, like Friedrich Nietzsche's madman, into the village square to announce not the death of God but the death of Man. The vaunted autonomous 'knowing subject' does not order experience rationally, as Kant mistakenly thought; on the contrary, the subject's experience is ordered by the prevailing cultural and ideological codes. What is falsely called knowledge is not merely pride but power. 'Man', the sovereign subject of knowledge, 'is only a recent invention.'⁹ The knowing subject is only a proxy of institutional power. The human sciences should therefore be replaced by cultural studies and ideology critique.

The human creature appears inherently unstable, a tensile being whose existence is paradoxical to the modern mind and an open question to the postmodern. From a theological perspective, however, the disproportion or fault-line that threatens to rip human being apart is not that of body and soul, nor finitude and infinity, but rather the tension between what men and women were originally created and destined to be, on the one hand, and what they have actually become, on the other. Theological anthropology

is, in this context, intimately related to the gospel, to the Good News that human life is not meaningless. When the Spirit of God ministers the Word of God, 'the self-understanding of man is not eliminated but penetrated, turned around, brought into a new direction and under a new lordship'.¹⁰

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS: THE CLASSICAL PARADIGM

Christian anthropologies affirm that both the beginning and the ending of the human story, both the origin and destiny of human being, are ultimately to be understood in the light of the triune God's creating, redeeming and sanctifying activity.

Human origins: sources of the self

Three indicative statements – all taken from Genesis, the book of 'beginnings' – form the leading themes in Christian reflection about human beings. Theological anthropology begins with these statements of faith and seeks, through reflection, greater understanding.

Being in the image of God

So God created man in his own image. (Genesis 1:27)

Christians ground their affirmation of human dignity and personhood in the special resemblance of the human creature to its Creator. Yet just what it is to be in God's image is a matter of some theological dispute. Is the *imago Dei* something humans have, do or are? To be in the *imago Dei* refers, first, to humanity's unique capacity for communion with God. With regard to all other creatures, God said, 'Let it be', but the creation of human being is prefaced by divine deliberation: 'Let us make.' All other creatures were made according to some generic pattern ('after their kind'), but the human creature was made after the divine pattern ('in our likeness'). Being in the image of God distinguishes the human creature from all others and renders human existence inviolable (Genesis 9:3, 6).

Irenaeus, the first Church Father to offer a systematic discussion of the *imago Dei*, drew a distinction between 'image' and 'likeness'. He suggested that the former refers to humanity's natural rational and moral capacities while the latter refers to the spiritual aspect of the human condition that had been lost through sin but restored through grace. The 'form' of the human consists chiefly in one's intellectual capacities; the 'matter' of the human may be sinful or holy, depending on the extent to which one recovers the

grace lost at the Fall. Augustine similarly located the human analogy to God in terms of the mind or soul, though he developed his position on the basis of his interpretation of the Trinity. Human being bears certain vestiges of the Trinity ('Let us make'), vestiges which Augustine finds in the human soul, namely, the 'trinity' of memory, intelligence and will. Augustine's psychological analogy, though rooted in the Trinity, tends towards oneness in its concept of God and towards individualism in its ensuing anthropology. This interpretation of the soul as the seat of the likeness to God was the normative view in Western theology until modern times.

Finite creaturely being

God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (*Genesis 2:7*)

Human being is a psycho-physical creature, an embodied soul or ensouled body. That the story of human origins occurs in the context of creation in general suggests that humans, like being in general, are dependent for their energy and matter on a source other than themselves. This dependence on God is not a complication but the theme of the human story, not a degeneration but the original condition of humankind. Finitude is not a problem that has to be solved by religion. 'And God saw what he had made, and behold, it was very good' (*Genesis 1:31*). The limitations and givens of human existence and the created order should not be rejected as constraints but accepted as enabling conditions for individual and social being. If human beings no longer feel at home in the world, it is not because the world is an inappropriate environment, but rather because they have polluted it, and themselves, by refusing the divine intention behind the created order.

Classical theology, despite its acknowledgement of the goodness of creation, tended, under the influence of Neoplatonism and other Hellenistic conceptual schemes, to privilege the soul over the body. A dualism of body and soul, in which the two were thought to be separate though related substances, eventually invaded Christian anthropology.¹¹ The rational soul, which God breathed into human being, was considered the superior part of the human constitution. Indeed, for Augustine the soul images God when it governs the body by using it as an instrument of knowing, willing and loving. It is the individual in his spiritual interiority that corresponds to the one God in his divine sovereignty.

Socio-sexual being

It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him. (*Genesis 2:18*)

This third indicative sentence states that human being is relational in a way that the other creatures are not. Sexual differentiation and relation are more than matters of biology. When humans are thought to be like God by virtue of their rational souls, however, the differences between the sexes tends not to be thought theologically significant. The history of the church's thinking about the body-soul relation is littered with unhealthy attitudes towards human sexuality. Patristic and medieval writers, with some exceptions, condemned the sensual pleasure of sexual intercourse and made celibacy mandatory for clergy. Yet Adam's loneliness in the absence of a female partner indicates the social, not merely sexual, character of the difference between male and female.

Human destiny: destinations of the self

What is God's final purpose for the human creature? If ethics defines the true end of human life, the 'good' life, then we could say that three ethical imperatives follow from the three preceding indicative statements. These imperatives guide human striving as we make the effort to exist and realise our desire to be.

The image of the Son: righteousness

Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (*Ephesians 4:24*)

The image of God concerns not only human origins but also human destiny. For Martin Luther and John Calvin, the *imago Dei* is less a matter of static properties than of a dynamic orientation of the whole person towards God. Sin turns the human creature away from its true destiny with God and bends the human creature in upon itself. Calvin continues to identify the *imago Dei* with the soul, but insists that the soul has become corrupt. The true image of God is seen only in Jesus Christ: he is the 'image of the invisible God' (*Colossians 1:15*); he 'bears the very stamp of his [God's] nature' (*Hebrews 1:3*). Luther calls Jesus 'God's proper man'. Christ is the true image of humanity: 'mankind's destiny in Christ is precisely the fruition of mankind's origin in Christ'.¹² The first 'ethical' imperative – 'put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness' – thus concerns integration, or better, reintegration: become what you are in Christ; become truly human. Because of the disintegrating effects of sin,

reintegration (personal and interpersonal) is less a given of nature than a gift of grace.

The creation-cultural mandate: work

Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. (Genesis 1:28)

The second ethical imperative is known as the creation, or cultural, mandate. The human creature, body and soul, must cultivate both 'nature' and 'spirit' in order to become 'co-creators' or 'vice-regents' who rule over creation on God's behalf.¹³ Adam's naming of the animals is evidence of his dominion over them (Genesis 2:19–20). However, the Genesis text does not state that dominion is itself the image, but rather implies that it is a consequence of humanity's being in God's image. Moreover, it is far from clear that humankind's dominion over nature should result in a rule of power rather than a rule of peace.

'Be fruitful and multiply.' Man's destiny is to be a communal being, to inhabit and shape the social as well as the natural world. This is the commission to establish civilisation and to develop a God-glorifying culture. Culture is a form of serious play in which men and women, in joining together in rule-governed activities, come to share a world.¹⁴ Human beings structure and give meaning to everyday life through such ritual 'play' in society, politics and even religion. The human task, in both work and play, is to order the natural and social world. But to what end?

Worship and wedding: rest and feast

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31)

The Christian liturgy is a sacred play 'at the center of which is the supper that sums up the ministry and destiny of Jesus and links the created reality of human beings and their social life with their eschatological destiny'¹⁵ The last word to be said concerning the meaning of human life and of human destiny is not work, but rather rest – and feast. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, in response to the opening question, 'What is the chief end of man?', answers 'to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever'. Humans glorify God when they exist in right relationships: with their natural environment, with their fellow human creatures, with the opposite sex and with God. Our destiny is to be the kind of creature that God intended us to be; only then shall we fit into the created order and be agents of harmony rather than disruption. Human beings are not the heroes of the human story, for human destiny is not anthropo- but theocentric. 'Man is destined to praise God.'¹⁶

Scripture pictures humanity's enjoyment of God in terms of a sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9–10) and in terms of a wedding feast (Revelation 21). As sabbath rest completes God's creative activity, so resurrection completes God's work of new creation. The end of the story of the human creature is anticipated in Jesus' resurrection and completed at the Day of the Lord, when all things, not only the human heart, find their proper rest in God. 'It is not good for creation to be alone.' The goodness of the marriage relationship depicted in Genesis is an image of the true end of the human creature and the Creator.

THE HUMAN STORY: MODERN AND POSTMODERN COMPLICATIONS

In so far as the classical notion of the person as an individual rational substance was secularised, criticised and finally abandoned, the modern and postmodern chapters of the human story are best recounted under the rubric of the 'rise and fall of the subject'.

Descartes privatised the self by claiming that objectivity and certainty could be had by subjects who knew their own minds. Kant secularised the subject by proclaiming it an autonomous knower and doer. The knowing subject orders the world it experiences with categories of theoretical reason; the moral subject orders its freedom with categories of practical reason. Human consciousness is self-constituting and human freedom is self-determining. Humans are autonomous individuals, able through reason and freedom to transcend body, history and culture. The value and destiny of the human person became in modernity a human affair, a matter of self-transcendence. Modern thinkers sought to establish the dignity and value of human personhood 'from below', that is, independently of appeals to the divine. The second 'Humanist Manifesto' (1973) declares 'we begin with humans not God, nature not deity' and claims that 'moral values derive their source from human experience'. Yet the autonomous self, born with such fanfare in modernity, has increasingly come to be seen as a fiction, if not freak, of the Enlightenment.

A knowing subject?

A first set of objections concerns the autonomy of the *knowing* subject. Enlightenment thinkers believed in the rationality of the human race. As Kant acknowledged, however, human history does not actually confirm this optimistic analysis. In the light of the phenomenon of radical evil, what

guarantee is there that the rational animal will continue to use its freedom rationally, that is, for the good? Given the evident corruption of human freedom, Kant could only hope that the end of history would be rational. For G. W. F. Hegel, history is itself the unfolding of *Geist* (Spirit): human freedom, embodied in culture and social institutions, develops with rational necessity. Søren Kierkegaard, on the other hand, saw free choice in terms of radical contingency, the dizzying power of the 'either-or'. The self is unfinished and must choose itself anew at every moment. Human being, for Kierkegaard, is a constitutionally risky project. For the existentialist heirs of Kierkegaard, the problem of concrete being (existence) takes precedence over propositions about abstract being (essence). In the light of actual historical existence, the classification of human being as the 'rational animal' appears somewhat hollow, if not perverse.

A further objection to the notion of the autonomous knower concerns the peculiar conception of rationality to which it gave rise. To be rational or 'objective' is to position oneself over against the world 'out there'. Reason becomes an instrument of the subject's will to power; understanding becomes a means of gaining control over some aspect of natural, or social, reality. Knowledge is a form of mastery. Even friends of modernity have found it necessary to question this notion of knowledge. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas, for instance, notes two conflicting tendencies, both modern but at odds with one another, that follow from this subject-centred version of rationality: on the one hand, modern thinkers have proclaimed the ultimate value and rights of the individual; on the other, the increasingly technological thrust of instrumental reason, which treats all areas of life as regions that require rational management, tends to construe the value of an individual in terms of his or her function.

Rationality in the modern paradigm thus appears as a strategy for acquiring, increasing and securing power over others – human and non-human. Scientific knowledge is 'dominating knowledge'; in grasping the world we appropriate it to ourselves. There is a direct correlation between the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy and the contemporary ecological crisis. The notion of the autonomous knower thus ends up depriving the human creature of its dignity and the earth of its integrity.

A spiritual subject?

In modernity's story, the human subject is 'self-constituting' – able to take charge of itself, of its freedom and its actions. With this theme, modernity has effectively privatised and secularised the classical theological view

that privileged soul over body. Searching criticisms have been directed at this concept of the autonomous *moral* subject as well.

Behavioural psychologists, approaching human being 'from below', argue that 'the behavior of man and animal alike must be placed on the same level'.¹⁷ Instincts and environmental conditioning are the keys that reveal the mainsprings of human behaviour. Freudian psychologists, on the other hand, contend that to explain human behaviour one has to probe the unconscious. Both schools agree, however, that human consciousness, that is, the private mental life of the individual, is neither autonomous nor rational. Sigmund Freud's work, along with other 'masters of suspicion' (for example, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche), began decentring the knowing subject in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, socio-biologists have suggested that every aspect of our social lives is but a sub-plot in a broader evolutionary drama scripted by human DNA. The true story of the self is about human genes that seek to survive long enough to reproduce. Altruism is, for instance, a biologically determined strategy by which some genes are sacrificed for the greater good of the gene pool. On this view, human values are reduced to biological facts: 'inevitably values will be constrained in accordance with their effects on the human gene pool'.¹⁸ Nature swallows up freedom.

Is the self able to be responsible for itself, as Enlightenment and existentialist thinkers have generally maintained, or is its behaviour determined? Do the genes that we inherit predispose certain humans to alcoholism? to altruism? Is it possible to save human freedom and dignity, to preserve the person, and if so, on what grounds?¹⁹ Arthur Peacocke offers the salient reminder that the issue 'is whether or not the theories ... and concepts formulated in one science operating at its own level can be shown to be but special cases of, that is 'reduced to', the theories, etc., formulated in some other branch of science'.²⁰ Why should one think that human beings are 'nothing but' atoms and molecules, egos and ids, genes and DNA? From a theological point of view, what constraints our genetic make-up places on our nature is simply the 'given' within which freedom is to operate. 'Human being' covers a complex hierarchy of 'systems' (for example, biological, chemical, psychological, social, etc.), each with a science appropriate to its level. Is there any compelling reason to believe that electrons are 'more real' than, say, the emotions of a human person, a social fact or even divine election? It follows from an acknowledgement of different levels of reality that no one description at any one level should be granted absolute status. Indeed, it is the very need for multiple levels of description – including the

properly theological (for example, the capacity to relate personally to God) – that distinguishes humanity from the other species.

An individual subject?

The autonomy of the self has been questioned not only by the natural sciences but also by recent cultural studies. The latter claim that the material processes by which knowledge and values are culturally transmitted can be every bit as deterministic on the intellectual level as DNA is thought to be on the molecular level. Determinisms of 'nature' (for example, socio-biology) and 'nurture' (for example, socio-linguistics) alike cast doubt upon the independence and individuality of the subject. According to structuralist anthropologies, the individual, far from being self-constituting, is rather born into cultural systems which, like languages, are organised into a series of binary oppositions (for example, body/soul; male/female; orthodox/heretical; fact/value) that predetermine how the subject experiences and interprets the world. Jacques Lacan, invoking Freud, suggests that 'the unconscious is structured ... like a language'.²¹ Thinking, behaviour and language are largely shaped by prevailing cultural codes. And, from a Marxist point of view, the individual's conscious thought is governed by an underlying ideology: 'all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects'.²² The self becomes a function of the system.

Poststructuralists question the universality and 'givenness' of cultural and linguistic structures. Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault undo, in different ways, the authority of linguistic and ideological structures or systems by interpreting them as social expressions of Nietzsche's 'will to power'. According to Nietzsche, human being is the 'not fully defined animal'. Derrida agrees, and proceeds to 'deconstruct' all attempts to assign a definition or stable meaning to human being. Derrida exposes all cultural and conceptual structures (that is, systems of differences) as always only conventional, never natural. Far from representing the nature of things, language is rather a means of imposing order on to them. Habitual forms of language so dominate history, culture and politics that Foucault proclaimed the end of the human sciences. The 'I' is not the speaking subject, only an 'effect' of language. 'Man', the autonomous knowing subject, is dead. What is left of the subject in postmodernity are multiple fragments of a de-centred self.

In summary: the human story as told by traditional Christianity was a divine comedy, an account of how individual human subjects – souls – are saved by God. Enlightenment thinkers transformed the human story into a secular romance: the adventure of the human subject in a world whose

natural and social orders can be 'mastered' by instrumental reason. Later existentialist stories, on the other hand, were largely tragic, for the subject is both protagonist and antagonist, alienated both from the world and from authentic human existence. Finally, postmodern accounts are mainly ironic: the modern subject has been exposed as a fiction, its self-congratulatory story undone. It remains to be seen whether or not the dissolution of the classical paradigm of the subject marks the end of the human story or only a promising new beginning.

THE HUMAN STORY: CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Rahner: theological anthropology 'from below'

Karl Rahner accepts modernity's turn to the subject and claims to discover therein the conditions for the possibility of God's self-communication. The ability to experience the transcendent, to 'hear' God, is the defining characteristic of human being: 'man is spirit, that is, he lives his life in a perpetual reaching out to the Absolute, in openness to God'.²³ The human creature, in its *natural* constitution, is 'a being who has to do with God'.²⁴ Human nature simply *is* the capacity for self-transcendence, that is, the capacity for God. The turn to the subject need not be a turning in upon oneself.

Christology is decisive for Rahner's understanding of theology and anthropology alike. Christ 'is the union of the historical manifestation of the question which man is and the answer which God is'.²⁵ On the one hand, Christ represents the culmination of human openness, the realisation of humanity's capacity for receiving God's self-communication. When God assumes in Christ the mystery of human capacity for the infinite mystery as his own reality, human existence reaches the very point towards which it is always moving by virtue of its essence. On the other hand, Christ shows us what God becomes in the culmination of his self-communication *ad extra*. The incarnation is the historical culmination of God's gracious self-communication to nature. The ultimate definition of man is that 'he is the possible mode of existence of God if God exteriorizes himself to what is other than himself'.²⁶ Christ is thus both the total openness of humanity to God and the total self-communication of God to humanity.

Barth: anthropology 'from above'

Karl Barth believes that revisionist attempts, such as Rahner's, to ground theology in human subjectivity are ultimately unable to speak either of God

or of humanity correctly. Barth reverses the direction characteristic of liberal theologies: human beings must understand themselves in the light of God, not vice versa. Barth undertook a massive reinterpretation of Christian theology, including anthropology, on the basis of God's self-revelation in Christ. Instead of christology being a predicate of anthropology (for example, christology as 'transcendent' anthropology, as in Rahner), Barth sees anthropology as a predicate or subset of christology. Christology alone lays the proper groundwork on which to consider the human creature, both in its relation to God and in its relation to others. The proper study of mankind, Barth might say paraphrasing Pope, is Christ: 'the existence of this one man concerns every other man as such'.²⁷

Jesus' life is absolutely decisive: 'the fact that we are with God is not merely one of the many determinations of our being ... but the basic determination, original and immutable. Godlessness is not, therefore, a possibility, but an ontological impossibility for man.'²⁸ It is not that Jesus is the completion of humanity but rather that he constitutes true (as opposed to false, or fallen) humanity: 'this man is man'.²⁹ The identity of Jesus' person is less an expression of universal human subjectivity than it is a matter of Jesus' particular history.³⁰ Jesus is not simply an intense expression of the common human experience of 'God-consciousness'; nor is christology simply anthropology writ large. Humanity is related to God not on the basis of transcendental consciousness – by nature, as it were – but on the basis of God's free decision to elect the human creature as his partner – by grace.

The incarnation reveals God as the one who is with and for humanity ('Emmanuel': 'God with us'). This 'cohumanity' that defines God also pertains to human nature in general, and is best seen in the differentiation of the sexes. Barth observes that in Genesis 1:26 there is a plural pronoun ('Let us make man') and then a reference to man as 'male and female'. The male–female relation images God's free orientation towards another. In God's being, as in human being, there is differentiation and relation between the 'I' and the 'Thou'. To be a self is to be able to sustain relationships with what is not oneself: 'Man never exists as such, but always as the human male or the human female.'³¹ Sexuality, and the male–female duality in particular, becomes an image for the difference-in-relatedness that characterises human, and divine, being in general. It is therefore impossible to speak about humanity apart from 'cohumanity': the human person is both irreducibly individual and constitutionally interrelated.

Pannenberg: anthropology 'from the end'

Wolfhart Pannenberg, like Rahner, interprets humanity's openness to the world in terms of an openness to God. God is the horizon of the whole implied in every act of human self-transcendence. Yet the whole is not an implication of human existence, as in Rahner, but a matter for the future, for the end of history. Human existence is 'ecstatic' in so far as the present is lived in an awareness, either implicit or explicit, of the future. Pannenberg claims that this implicit awareness of wholeness is a structural universal in human being and accounts for the universality of religion. He is aware of the danger of beginning with anthropology (that is, we may never get beyond ourselves to God) and insists that theology should not appropriate non-theological anthropologies uncritically. He is not, therefore, searching for a 'point of contact' between Christian and non-Christian self-understanding. His aim is rather 'to lay theological claim to the human phenomena described in the anthropological disciplines'.³² Theology demonstrates its validity and universality by exposing the incompleteness of explanations of human experience that stop short of a consideration of this ultimate horizon. This is particularly clear in history, the discipline that Pannenberg believes both sums up the human story and yet ultimately fails to complete it; the historian fails to grasp the whole of human reality precisely because the whole is incomplete.

While methodologically Pannenberg argues 'from below', he accords 'material primacy' to the eternal Son. Human destiny – the full flowering of the image of God – has already been realised in Jesus' resurrection. Only through Jesus Christ do the general concepts of human nature and destiny, as well as of God and the Logos, acquire their true content. In the historical life of Jesus, the eternal relation of the Son to the Father takes human shape. Theological anthropology understands the human creature neither from its past nor from its present, but above all from the perspective of its future destiny – fellowship with God – manifested by Christ. Jesus is the eschatological man who, as the last Adam, reveals the true nature and meaning of the first.³³

Theological anthropology 'from the three': persons as relational

Theologians have recently discovered new resources in the doctrine of the Trinity for determining both the systematic structure of Christian dogmatics and the content of all its parts. That the font of all reality is three-in-one enabled the Greek Church Fathers to correct the ontology of the ancient Greek philosophers. One need not choose between Parmenides' monism and Democritus' pluralism. There is a Christian alternative to the problem of 'the

one and the many', namely, the *three in one*. By affirming that Jesus was *homoousios* with the Father the Church Fathers established a radical new ontological principle: 'that there can be a sharing in being'.³⁴ The Trinity – three persons in communion – defines the very being of God, and provides an ontological foundation for thinking about human personhood and interpersonal relationships as well. God is neither a monistic substance nor an autonomous subject, but a 'being in communion'. That is, God's being is identical with his acts of communion: begetting and being begotten, sending and proceeding.³⁵ The one being of God is a being in threefold relation: Father, Son and Spirit.

Several implications for theological anthropology follow from this trinitarian conception. Most importantly, personhood, not substance, comes first in the order of being. Second, persons are not autonomous individuals. Whereas individuals are defined in terms of their separation from other individuals, persons are understood in terms of their relations to other persons. This reverses Aristotle, for whom relation is subordinate to substance (that is, relations are what take place between individual substances). Aristotle presupposes that the individual substance is already complete, already potentially what it is, irrespective of its relations. On this view, relations are not constitutive of being. A trinitarian view, on the other hand, affirms that persons are what they are by virtue of their relations to others. For instance, I am a child in relation to my parents, a husband in relation to my wife, a father in relation to my children, a neighbour in relation to those who live near me, a teacher in relation to my students, a creature in relation to God and a disciple in relation to Christ. Some of these relations are free: I chose to marry my wife and I chose to become a teacher. Other relations are involuntary, for example, my being created by God and being born to my parents.

In the Augustinian tradition, one's relation to oneself was constitutive of one's personhood. We speak, for instance, of 'knowing one's mind'. Yet these internal relations alone do not define the person. Persons are embodied, and thus are partly constituted by their 'external' relations to others as well. All human beings are born into particular families, cultures and communities which have their own traditions, histories and language. At the same time, persons are individuals, and not merely cogs in a vast social machinery. Even in the intimacy of a marriage relationship, persons do not lose their individuality but strive for a unity which respects differences. The human creature is neither an autonomous individual nor an anonymous unit that has been assimilated into some collectivity, but rather a particular

person who achieves a concrete identity in relation to others. Human being is inherently *social*.

A trinitarian approach to theological anthropology avoids defining persons as relations, however, for such a definition would make it difficult to speak of relations *between* persons. The person is rather an irreducible ontological reality that cannot be defined in terms of something else. Perhaps the best way to render persons is to describe, in narrative rather than concept, how they typically relate and what they characteristically do. One of the primary ways in which humans relate is through language. Human being as communion is largely a matter of being in communication.

THE SELF AS SPEECH AGENT

In the poem, in the prayer, in the law, the reach of words is made very nearly equivalent to the humanity in man. (George Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 189)

The model of the self as speech agent may prove to be particularly fruitful for theological anthropology in so far as it specifies the nature of personal relatedness (namely, being-in-communication) without collapsing the person into the process. Humans are uniquely human when they engage in various kinds of speech acts: telling stories, making promises, asking and answering questions, praying and praising. To speak of the human creature as a speech agent is not to single out one attribute but to provide an integrative model that responds to the call for a non-reductive analysis of human being as relation. Language specifies the means and medium of personal relationships; agency specifies the role of human persons within these relationships. Persons are neither determined by language nor self-constituting, but rather agents able to initiate and respond to communication.

John Macmurray argues that we can understand the nature of personhood better by starting from the 'I do' rather than from Descartes' 'I think'. Indeed, 'Our knowledge of the world is primarily an aspect of our action in the world.'³⁶ To act means to take an initiative, to begin, to set something in motion. In thinking the mind alone is active; but doing engages both mind and body. Strictly speaking, only a person can 'act', that is, initiate and realise purpose by doing something that affects the world. Human action takes place within a web of relationships, which condition but do not determine the action. Conversely, what the human agent does affects the web. To be human is to have the dignity of agency: 'A life without speech and without action ... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.'³⁷

The self as communications centre

To be a person is to be a communicative agent in a web of communicative relationships with others.³⁸ These dialogical relationships take place in larger social, cultural and political contexts: 'We become the people we are as our identities are shaped through the patterns of communication and response in which we are engaged.'³⁹ On this view, the self is thoroughly relational (for example, 'socialised') yet retains its individual integrity. Individuality refers not to some underlying substance so much as to one's particular and typical pattern of communicative relations: 'Personal identity refers to the communicative form (the stance in relation; the form taken in call and response) which a person habitually takes.'⁴⁰

A focus on the self as speech agent effectively counters a number of contemporary attempts to undo the human subject. In philosophy and the human sciences, language has become the primary field of conflict in disputes about the nature of human being. Jacques Lacan's socio-linguistics is every bit as deterministic as socio-biology: it is not Nature but '*langue*' (namely, a language system) that stifles '*parole*' (namely, speech agency). When speakers are determined either by the language or by the genes they inherit, the possibility of acting freely and responsibly disappears, and personhood with it. Language can indeed become an instrument of power; the fragile process of communication is easily distorted. It is for this reason that the 1989 Manila Declaration of the World Association for Christian Communication affirmed communication as a human right and need as fundamental as food and shelter.⁴¹ To deny people a voice is to deny them their personhood. To deprive persons of speech agency is ultimately to dehumanise them.

Divine speech agency

Is the notion of self as speech agent a properly theological view of the human creature, or is it imported from non-theological comparisons between, say, humans and non-human creatures?⁴² A theological account of the self as speech agent should form its notion of speech agency in the light of distinctively Christian beliefs. The communicative agency which defines our identities and bestows our role is God's self-communicative activity in creation, Christ and Pentecost. To paraphrase Barth: God's being is a being-in-communicative-act. The triune divine communicative activity is prior to any creaturely response. God seeks in the created order a being similar enough to himself to be able to speak back to him. Humans are communicative agents like God because God is the one who goes out of himself in

communicative action (for example, the incarnate Word) for the sake of entering into a dialogical relation with another.

Scripture puts a special emphasis on men and women as communicative agents. Adam's dignity as crown of creation expressed itself in his naming of the animals and in his ability to speak with God. Fallen human beings have the image of God formally (for example, the capacity to communicate with God and others) but not materially (for example, this capacity is not functioning correctly); there are patterns of distortion in our communication with God and others, and with ourselves. Non-theological thinkers recognise distortions in patterns of communication, but only theology names these communicative distortions *sin*. Indeed, the most dangerous member of the body may be the tongue (James 3:5–10). Distorted patterns of communication eventually lead to a deformed or misshapen self. Hell is not others, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrongly maintained, but rather the inability to relate to others.⁴³ John Milton's Satan was nearer the mark: 'Myself am Hell.'⁴⁴ The attempt to be without God and others (sinful autonomy) leads to autism, that shrivelling of the self to the point of total self-absorption. Spiritual autism thus characterises a kind of solitary self-confinement that stems from the inability, or the unwillingness, to communicate with others. It is precisely to such a hell that deconstructionists and nihilistic postmodernists consign human being by denying that the self is capable of communicative agency. If the human creature is not a speaker but is spoken by language systems, then neither dialogue nor understanding – indeed, no healthy communicative relation – is possible. Deconstruction denies what the scriptures affirm of the human creature, namely, that speakers are responsible for their words.

Imago Dei

The paradigm of communicative agency is well suited to preserve the traditional emphasis on the image of God as rationality as well as the newer emphasis on the image of God as relatedness. Humans are like God in their ability to go out of themselves and enter into personal relations through communicative activity. The etymology of the Latin term for 'person' is instructive: *per-sonare* literally means 'to sound through'. What it means to be in the image of God is best grasped by an auditory rather than a visual analogy. The human creature is not so much *ikon* as an *echo* of the divine being and of the trinitarian communicative relations.

It is in the human face that the organs of communication are gathered together: 'Face and discourse are tied. The face speaks.'⁴⁵ Biblical wisdom literature recognises hearing as the root of true humanity: 'It is the hearing

... above all, that makes man ... the being able to answer.⁴⁶ Moreover, self-knowledge comes about not through reflection but through responding to the call of God. Nor does the human creature live by bread alone, but 'by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord' (Matthew 4:4). Words are nourishing because the human creature is a communicative agent. 'Thus the mouth, which expresses what ear and eye had perceived, becomes the organ which distinguishes man above all other creatures.'⁴⁷ No other part of the human body is associated with as many activities unique to humankind as the mouth: commanding, teaching, blessing, singing, crying, praying, to name but a few. Communicative agency thus refers to something the human creature is and does. Communicative capacity corresponds to the 'formal' image which constitutes the human creature as human; communicative excellence – right relatedness with others and with God – corresponds to the 'material' image by which the creature is conformed to the image of Christ.

AUTONOMY RECONSIDERED

The traditional view of the person as an autonomous knowing and moral subject gave rise to significant problems. How might the paradigm of the self as speech agent respond?

An autonomous knowing subject?

The paradigm of communicative agency responds admirably to criticism of the self as a solitary thinker. Habermas locates rationality not in subjective consciousness but in the processes of intersubjective communication.⁴⁸ Implied in every act of communication are three validity claims – to truth, rightness and sincerity – that cannot be imposed but must be agreed. Habermas contends that coming to a rationally motivated mutual understanding is implicit in the very structure of language. By emphasising communicative rationality, we may retrieve part of the classical theological tradition, albeit in a new key. What was misleading about the classical identification of the image with 'reason' was the individualistic and instrumental notion of rationality that accompanied it. Rationality is neither individualistic nor disembodied, but rather a corporate communicative process.⁴⁹ It is less a quality located in human nature than in the communicative process between persons: 'Come, let us reason together' (Isaiah 1:18).

An autonomous moral subject?

The body-spirit dichotomy has traditionally generated questions about the nature of human freedom and morality. If there is no separable 'spirit'

that supervises one's bodily actions, then how are freedom and morality possible? Again, speech agency provides a helpful corrective to the classical story about the self in so far as it encourages us to conceive of the human person as psychosomatic unity in terms of being-in-communicative-act.

The biblical narratives depict human persons in terms of their being towards God's covenant. What matters is not merely outward behaviour nor, on the other hand, merely the dispositions of one's heart, but rather one's whole-person response to the Word of God and the total pattern of one's historical existence. The particular form that a person's communication takes is the 'spirit' of the individual. The human spirit is not some self-same unchanging substratum of the body so much as the underlying pattern of response that emerges in communicative action. 'Spirit' is the appearance of communicative freedom in history – human being in communicative action. Accordingly, 'spirit' is not to be understood in terms of a Cartesian dualism between spiritual and spatial substances, but rather in terms of that which makes possible both consciousness and culture, namely, communicative agency. If the body is the *field* of communication, spirit is communication's guiding *force*. When speech is denied, so too is spirit. This concern lay behind Kierkegaard's attempts to help his readers grasp the importance of speaking in their own voices: 'Not until the spiritual is posited is language invested with its rights.'⁵⁰ When we no longer view ourselves as speakers but as spoken by language, we call spirit itself into question and begin to disappear as persons. Kierkegaard's critique of modernity is concentrated in his charge that the modern self is spiritless.⁵¹

The human creature, as speech agent, is both animal and spirit.⁵² Those activities and actions that are distinctively human are those that are communicative. Humans, of course, engage in other activities – eating and drinking, hunting, playing, procreating – but these activities are not distinctively human. The presence of speech transforms those activities we share with the non-human animal world: 'we humans dine, an activity which is the occasion for conversation, and we human beings procreate ... within the covenant of marriage, a covenant enacted by speech.'⁵³ Human being inhabits a material condition which is the condition for, but not the explanation of, human speech.

An autonomous individual subject?

Lastly, the model of the self as speech agent puts to rest the mistaken notion that persons are autonomous individuals. We come to know ourselves and others by participating in forms of life. Ludwig Wittgenstein's

preoccupation with describing concrete forms of life was intended as 'a kind of anthropology' that makes us aware 'of the kinds of creature we are'.⁵⁴ A person's individual identity is formed through communicative interactions with others. Individuals are called into being, that is, into communicative action, by others. A person is a centre of communications in a social context. Personal identity is enacted as one puts the socially governed communication system into motion and initiates speech acts that interact with others.

THE CHRISTIAN STORY: THE PERSON AS COMMUNICATIVE AGENT IN COVENANTAL RELATION

The person as evoked and acknowledged

God creates human persons by calling them forth out of nothing to the dignity of fellowship. To know oneself is to know oneself as evoked and summoned by God. Creation and redemption alike are the results of trinitarian self-communication: in the beginning was the communicative act. The human creature was bespoke by God and gifted with speech. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, the human creature is one to whom and through whom God is able to communicate, and therefore may be reckoned a 'word of God'.⁵⁵

To be human is to have the capacity to be called and so to enter into covenantal relation with another. The self is summoned by many others – parents by children, husbands by wives, friends by friends and neighbours, etc. – and achieves its particularity in its response. Christian faith declares that, over and above and *through* these encounters with others, the self is also called by God. Indeed, the self-knowledge which Socrates pursued is only possible when one is *acknowledged* by God. Eberhard Jüngel argues that the point of the doctrine of justification by faith is that humans do not and cannot define themselves by their own works. Rather, we only become human when we know ourselves to be recognised and acknowledged as human by God. We cannot achieve humanity – recognition in the sight of God as a dialogue partner – by our works.⁵⁶ Speech agency, far from being an autonomous power exercised in an arbitrary context, is rather a divine gift that enables communion and community.

The person as self-conscious

What distinguishes humans from all other creatures is the ability to say 'I'. Human beings are not only sentient but sapient, not only able to have experiences but to reflect upon them. At the heart of our personhood is our

ability to speak in the first person, the ability to initiate speech acts and to recognise our own voice as responsible for responding to the call of God and neighbour. It is largely through language, and through the use of the pronoun 'I', that the self is able to relate to itself and so attain a degree of self-consciousness. However, I can only say 'I' when I can also say 'you'. To be a speech agent is to be and relate 'as an I which is "called out" ... as a dialogue partner'.⁵⁷ Most importantly: we only recognise ourselves as singular subjects of communicative action through a social process in which others call us by name, call us to response and responsibility and so call us to ourselves. 'I' am 'indexed' (for example, shown, located) by others who call on me. The pronoun 'I' signals our self-awareness, that is, our awareness of ourselves as responding and responsible communicative agents.

The person as temporal

It is primarily the relation of the person to his or her words that gives the human creature a sense of temporality. Personal identity can be conceived in two different ways. It could mean, first, the self-sameness of substance, where the person is characterised by a list of unchanging properties. Like Oliver Twist, the human person remains essentially the same throughout its adventures; what happens in time is of no consequence. Alternatively, personal identity could mean self-constancy: identity on this view is not a matter of being an unchanging substance but rather a faithful subject. The self is more like David Copperfield, who only knows whether he will be the hero of his own life-story by recounting his personal history. Personal integrity is less a metaphysical (for example, mind-body) problem than an ethical one that pertains to how we relate ourselves to our word. Personal identity is a matter of constancy in one's communicative relations; personal integrity a matter of being true to one's word. Humans are creatures of covenantal discourse, communicative agents that are able to make, break and keep promises. 'The constancy of faithful speech finds its paradigm in the spirit of the biblical God whose word ... endures forever'.⁵⁸

Communicative freedom

Is the way a self develops predetermined? Does biology or sociology, one's nature or nurture, so condition the self's responses as to deprive it of free agency? In the Christian story, one's 'yes' or 'no' is one's own 'yes' or 'no'. We may not always enjoy freedom of movement, but we retain the power to consent. What humans say is not simply a function of their place in some 'system'. God's intention to create persons who can respond to his

communication establishes an ontological structure of freedom. 'God's address determines the structure of human being as response without determining the form of that response.'⁵⁹ Speakers, for instance, inherit language codes, but they are able to put these codes to various kinds of use as well as modify them. It is through the preaching of the gospel, for example, that persons are set free. Indeed, it is pre-eminently God's Word that breaks open closed situations and creates, through this 'interruption', the opportunity of free personal response.⁶⁰

Communicative responsibility

Human persons relate to others primarily through communicative activity. The relations in which the self is involved and constituted as personal are not merely internal (for example, memory, choosing, thought) nor merely external (for example, material, causal), but rather communicative. The promise, above all, is the place where the self relates itself to itself and to others through its words. Promising makes manifest what is the case in all speech acts, namely, that speech agency is a matter of giving one's word to another. The self is thus responsible for its words; our word is our bond. The 'I will' that seals the marriage covenant is a promise, not a piece of rhetoric. It is only in this context of interpersonal relationships (promise and commitment) that the sex act becomes communicative rather than merely instrumental. Marriage is a communicative action (for example, promising) that constitutes a privileged and exclusive interpersonal relation. The human creature is social in so far as its life is regulated by various patterns of communicative action and responsibility. The self is entangled in 'webs of interlocution'.⁶¹

Communication and covenant

The human person is a communicative agent in various covenantal relationships. We need not follow Nietzsche and those postmodernists who view human beings in terms of the will to power; that way madness lies. The desire to assimilate things, and other humans, to oneself, is a deformity of the human creature. From the perspective of Christian faith it is more accurate to see the human creature not as a centre of power but of communications. The purpose of communicative agency is to relate and to participate with others, not to appropriate or possess them.

Christian existence is a matter of the relation a speaker bears to his own words. Faithfulness may be defined as the religious relation to one's own words; the life of faith is the life of faithful speech. 'Aesthetic' speech, on the

other hand, speech in which the speaker does not 'own up to' his words, is a way of avoiding responsibility for oneself, and ultimately of denying one's true personhood.⁶² God evokes human creatures through his creative, saving and sanctifying activity and calls them to faithful fellowship. Humans, as communicative and covenantal creatures, respond to this call, sometimes appropriately (for example, the obedience of Abraham), sometimes inappropriately (for example, the unfaithfulness of Israel). The church too exists as a gathered people by virtue of the divine call (*ekklesia* = 'called out of'). To be human is to participate in the covenant of divine discourse as a faithful hearer and speaker.

CONCLUSION: HUMAN BEING AS VOCATION

... lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.
(*Ephesians 4:1*)

We are in the image of God in so far as we are able to respond to the call of God, of others and of our own conscience. But it is God's address to us in Jesus Christ that draws us forward eschatologically towards our destiny as human creatures.

The vocation of being human follows from God's prior evocation. We are called into existence through the triune God's self-communicative activity. Being human thus involves both indicative and imperative dimensions: what we should do follows from the kind of creatures we are. Personhood is a vocation. Being human means being summoned: to be male or female, to be free and responsible, to live well with others in justice and peace, to glorify God. Human personhood is both privilege and responsibility. Other creatures fulfil their vocation unconsciously: 'The heavens declare the glory of God.' It is the special privilege accorded the human creature to do so freely and gladly. All that the human creature does – whether eating, drinking, marrying, working, etc. – should be oriented to the glory of God. Such is the measure of the human vocation.⁶³

The human creature is called above all to be a witness. It is the vocation of human being to be echoes of God's evocative creative, reconciling and redeeming action.⁶⁴ To know oneself is to know oneself as summoned, as evoked from nothingness for the purpose of witnessing to and fellowshiping with the one in whom is hid the fullness of being. The 'glorious exchange' is a pre-eminently communicative act: Christ is the Word of God who expired on our behalf and sends the Spirit to inspire; the breath that animates human being should, in turn, be used to give glory and praise back

to God. The goal of vocation is fellowship and the essence of vocation is witness. Humanity's 'chief end' – to glorify God and enjoy him for ever – is thus an eminently communicative one.

Jesus Christ is paradigmatic both of the divine communicative initiative and the human communicative response. Christ's communicative agency so corresponds to that of the Father that he is identified as God's Word. God's faithfulness to his Word proves God to be true and Jesus to be the truth. The story of Jesus, from incarnation through resurrection, is the supreme instance of what it is to bind oneself to one's Word, to oneself and to others. The gospel summons the self to its proper vocation – faithful speech agency – as well. 'It is a declaration. And as it comes to us, it is an address, promise and demand, a question and answer ... It encounters us, speaks with us, addresses us in terms of I and Thou.'⁶⁵ It is primarily by virtue of this dialogical relation that human being is summoned to its truest self.

'Know thyself.' From the perspective of Christian faith, there is no self-knowledge apart from the knowledge of God in Christ. To know oneself, as one whose individual and social being has been decisively shaped by Jesus Christ, is to accept gratefully one's vocation as a responsive and responsible communicative agent who exists in covenantal relation with oneself, with others and with God.

Notes

- 1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John MacNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), book 1, ch. 1, section 2, p. 37.
- 2 Francis Quarles, *Hieroglyphics of the Life of Man* (1638), 1, 1.1.
- 3 Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (London: SCM, 1993, enlarged edn), p. 35.
- 4 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993), p. 5.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 6 See Charles Taylor, 'Self-interpreting Animals', in *Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 45–76.
- 7 George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 197.
- 8 Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 20.

- 9 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. xxiii.
- 10 Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981), vol. 1, p. 544.
- 11 There were, however, some important exceptions to this rule. Second-century Christian apologists argued, in opposition to the Gnostics, that the body too was fully part of God's good creation. And Justin Martyr stressed, against Plato, that the soul was created, neither pre-existent nor independently immortal.
- 12 Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), p. viii.
- 13 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 60; D. J. A. Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968):101.
- 14 See J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge Kegan, 1949).
- 15 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), pp. 337–8.
- 16 Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), p. 228.
- 17 J. B. Watson, *Behaviorism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1930) cited in Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, p. 29.
- 18 Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), p. 175.
- 19 For theological approaches to this problem, see Arthur Peacocke, *God and the New Biology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); Ronald Cole-Turner, *The New Genesis: Theology and the Genetic Revolution* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), ch. 10.
- 20 Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, p. 40.
- 21 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 234.
- 22 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 171.
- 23 Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 66.
- 24 Rahner, 'Person', in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 1221.
- 25 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 225.
- 26 Rahner, 'Man (Anthropology)', in *Encyclopedia of Theology*, p. 893.
- 27 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), vol. III, part 2, p. 134.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

- 30 See Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).
- 31 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, part 4, p. 117.
- 32 Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 19.
- 33 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), vol. II, p. 317.
- 34 Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), p. 8.
- 35 John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), p. 17.
- 36 John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 101.
- 37 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 176.
- 38 This thesis has been admirably argued by Alistair I. McFadyen, in *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Communicative agency develops what Gunton terms 'the alternative tradition' for thinking of the person, namely, the self as agent (*The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 90).
- 39 McFadyen, *Call to Personhood*, p. 7.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 41 'Communication is God's unique gift to humankind, through which individuals and societies can become more truly human. Genuine communication is as essential to the quality of life as food, shelter and health care' (cited in Michael Traber and Kaarle Nordenstreng, *Few Voices, Many Worlds: Towards a Media Reform Movement* (London: World Association for Christian Communication, 1992), p. 33).
- 42 On the question of whether speech distinguishes human beings from other animals, see Mary Midgley, *Beast & Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (London: Methuen, 1980), ch. 10.
- 43 That 'hell is other people' was the conclusion to Sartre's play *Huis Clos* (*No Exit*).
- 44 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book 4, line 75.
- 45 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 87.
- 46 Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 74. Cf. von Rad: 'Constitutive for man's humanity is the faculty of hearing' (cited in *ibid.*, p. 76).
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 48 See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). Trinitarian theology provides ontological grounding for the notion that personal being is being-in-communicative-relation. Some critics believe Habermas is vulnerable at just this point, for he has no means of showing that communicative rationality is fundamentally prior to instrumental rationality.
- 49 See Niels Thomassen, *Communicative Ethics in Theory and Practice*, trans. John Irons (London: Macmillan, 1992).

- 50 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. David Swenson (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1959), vol. I, p. 66.
- 51 See Ronald L. Hall, *Word & Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 5.
- 52 See Fergus Kerr's review of David Braine, *The Human Person: Animal and Spirit* (London: Duckworth, 1993) in *New Blackfriars* (July/August 1993): 333-7.
- 53 Hall, *Word & Spirit*, p. 61.
- 54 The point is Norman Malcolm's, as recounted by Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 74.
- 55 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Man In History: A Theological Study* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 228.
- 56 For an extended treatment of this point, see Eberhard Jüngel, 'On Becoming Truly Human: The Significance of the Reformation Distinction Between Person and Works for the Self-Understanding of Modern Humanity', in *Theological Essays*, trans. and ed. John B. Webster (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), vol. II, ch. 10.
- 57 McFadyen, *Call to Personhood*, p. 23.
- 58 Hall, *Word & Spirit*, p. 191.
- 59 McFadyen, *Call to Personhood*, p. 22.
- 60 Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), p. 165.
- 61 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 38-9.
- 62 So Hall, *Word & Spirit*, pp. 74-80.
- 63 See Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian's Calling: Luther on Vocation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957).
- 64 According to George Hunsinger's reading of Barth, justification and sanctification can be interpreted as the external basis of vocation, 'and vocation as the internal basis or telos of justification and sanctification' (*How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 154).
- 65 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, part 3, p. 83.

Further reading

- Berkouwer, G. C., *Man: The Image of God*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1962.
- Brunner, Emil, *Man in Revolt*, translated by Olive Wyon, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947.

- McFadyen, Alistair I., *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 volumes, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985.
- Schwöbel, Christoph, and Colin Gunton, editors, *Persons Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991.
- Wolff, Hans Walter, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981.
- Zizioulas, John D., *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985.

10 Redemption and fall

TREVOR HART

The notion of redemption or salvation is a basic constituent in the plot of the story which Christian faith tells about human existence in God's world. The characteristic designation of this story as 'gospel', good news, already bears within it the assumption of a human race in some serious need or lack or crisis, whether it is aware of it or not. To unpick this central thread and seek to remove it in order to accommodate the more optimistic and comfortable stories furnished by the cultures of premodernity, modernity and post-modernity alike, would be to run the risk of the tapestry of Christian belief and self-understanding unravelling, so vital is it to the design and structure of the whole. Humans, Christians contend, need to be rescued from a plight which currently distorts and ultimately threatens to destroy their creaturely well-being under God, but which lies utterly beyond their control or influence. But just what sort of threat is this? And by what means are we to think of it as having been met?

The history of Christian doctrine reveals a remarkable variety and diversity of answers to these questions, and this for two chief reasons. First, the biblical text itself (which furnishes the raw materials for the theological craft) offers a striking kaleidoscope of metaphors in its attempts to make sense of and develop this central theme of the gospel. Second, these images have in turn been taken up, interpreted and developed within a vast range of different social and historical contexts, each bringing its distinctive questions and concerns and expectations to bear upon the text. Not surprisingly, as each age, each socially located group, has interrogated the apostolic tradition afresh, it has found that some parts speak more naturally and immediately to its particular world of meaning, and, understandably, has sought to develop these aspects rather than others in fleshing out an account of salvation relevant to its context.

Particular construals of salvation, then, are closely linked to particular social contexts and human situations, both in terms of their origins and the ways in which they are later taken up and developed. What this amounts to

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Constructive Christian doctrine was for a long time in the doldrums, its contents progressively brought into question by representatives of intellectual modernism. But recent years have seen something of a revival in its fortunes. This is due to a number of factors, among them the critique of modernism and a stress on the particular and relative independence of the distinctive intellectual disciplines.

Theology has always taken a shape related to the culture in which it is set, and *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* is no exception. The fourteen chapters, written by established theologians from Britain and America, attempt to develop the promise inherent in the changed intellectual situation, while at the same time introducing some of the central topics of theology. The book is divided into two parts, with the first six chapters examining Christian theology in its current setting, and the second eight treating major topics among those traditional in Christian doctrine. While it has not been possible to include an account of everything, there has nevertheless been built a framework within which detailed treatment of other doctrines could be developed. The advantage of the compression is that topics are brought into relation which might be worse treated in relative isolation.

New readers and non-specialists will find this an accessible and stimulating introduction to the content of the main themes of Christian doctrine, while advanced students and specialists will find a useful summary of recent developments which demonstrates the variety, coherence and intellectual vitality of contemporary Christian thought.

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Edited by Colin E. Gunton

King's College London

 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS